

Now They're Trying to Make a Fine Lady Out of Gay Broadway

With Soul Unchanged by All the Years, to Be Hedged In by Conventions Will Be Something New, Indeed—Critics Planning Transformation Have Scant Consideration for Charms of Irregularity and Local Color

Now the Broadway Association wants to make a lady out of Broadway!

Whatever else Broadway has been, and she has been and is a comrade of delightful things, she never was a lady.

In the days when Benjamin Franklin occasionally week ended in New York, Broadway made some pretensions to be a residential street, but she couldn't keep these up. The "best" people



Major Henry G. Opdycke, head of the Broadway Association.

then, if by an error of social judgment, they had built near Chambers street, were not long in learning that it was in the quieter side streets, in Great Jones, Bond and Bleeker, that the aristocracy of the period flourished. Consequently the residences on Broadway were not slow in falling into the boarding house scale. Quite early in its career it yielded to the claims of business.

For long, however, the street preserved the distinction of being a parade street. Before and after the civil war period great processions marched up and down its rough pavement. Confederate prisoners on their way to detention camps, with eyes lowered and slouch hats drawn down over faces, walked slowly and without calling out a jeer past the brothers of the North who still preserved for these unhappy ones some brotherly feeling. In the history of Broadway New York's various early civic entertainments found their fitting setting.

Rapid Transit 100 Years Ago.

As early as these events run back the powerful street labored under transportation disadvantages, even as it does to-day. In the first decade of the nineteenth century a stage ran to Greenwich Village, nine years later a stage line was in operation between Bowling Green and Bloomingdale and a little later Kip and Bond were running "Lady Washington," "Lady Clinton," "De Witt Clinton" and other omnibuses named from celebrated persons to Bleeker street and charging each passenger a shilling (12½ cents) for the ride. In 1850 a car line was proposed, but it took Jacob Sharp years of persistent bribery to lay the tracks. On June 20, 1858, "Jake" and "The Forty Thieves," as the Aldermen friendly to him were called, got on the first car to run on Broadway and rode to Fifty-seventh street.

Poor Broadway, meanwhile, had suffered in the esteem of fickle New Yorkers, who easily deserted it for the East Side streets improved by Commodore Vanderbilt's enterprise. During the long wait betwixt anticipation of rapid transit and its realization, it endured more than any street should be compelled to endure. It has been torn up for one thing or another from 1830 to the present time. In that earlier year it was dug up to insert the cable and remained in a state of chaos until 1862, the cable failing, there was a temporary return to horse cars, but Broadway had scarce time to breathe before it was again all holes and hills, in order to install the electric system. The first electric car passed along the three unhappy street on May 26, 1901.

A Has the Broadway Tanks!

What unfeeling pen would rehearse the horrible tale of what the subway did to Broadway? It has recovered so recently that to advert to its long continued disheveled state could not be less than unkind.

The association demands that the "tanks" that move up and down the thoroughfare be sold to some epigone, banana republic and the rails be used for barbed wire. Buses, the members say, are the answer. Any one going further can use the subway.

In the matter of uniform lighting



"Gosh, ain't them buildings"

the association is equally firm in its appeal for reform. Away back in 1789 an ordinance was passed by the city officials that every seventh householder should hang outside his gate a lantern with a lighted candle in it, so that the wayfarer by night should not lose his way in the fastnesses of Rodeo street or the purlieus of Bleeker street. Never since that historic time, it is said, has there been a concerted plan to light the great street, but every section of it has had its own way. To revert to the simple scheme of the early eighteenth century is scarce practicable for Broadway has virtually no residents down town. The association does not propose a reversal to ancient conditions, but argues that a centralized and single system, similar to that now in use on Fifth avenue, shall be adopted immediately. Except for the light it receives from private enterprises, it is said, Broadway would be in virtual darkness for long stretches.

Briefly these are the main reforms to be asked.

Broadway's Bad Teeth.

Along Fourteenth street as far as Forty-second street the old way has been torn and receding gums. Tall, gaunt buildings, like fangs here and there, disfigure parts of Broadway which otherwise might be slightly. Signs of buildings, left untouched by the hand of improvement, snarlingly confront the modern fronts and make a painful contrast. Lazy and indifferent owners, and capitalists willing to lose income rather than be bothered by it, it is said, blame for this fell disease.

In that section of the street which once was the theatrical promenade, from Twenty-third street to Forty-second street, this evil is most manifest. It appears to have eaten its way along the west side of the street; in one block an entire series of two-story buildings marks its retarding



course. With the destruction of the hotels, Fifth Avenue, Hoffman, Albee, St. James, and the moving away of Delmonico's from the neighborhood, the blocks between Twenty-fifth street and Thirtieth street completely changed their character. In the middle '80s these were tenanted by shops that the whole country knew by name. Madame went there for her shoes, her eyeglasses, her photograph, et al; she goes there no longer, or if she does go it is to wonder where her favorite shop has gone. The swagger show shop is replaced by a shoe polishing emporium or a quick lunch counter; the favorite caterer and skillful optician have long since deserted the block and gone to Fifth Avenue. Daily's, once the resort of fashionable audiences, stands a barrack, boarded up, and behind it, with the dim lettering still decipherable, "Weber and Fields" reveals through countless windows, let into a once dead wall, costumers and corset makers.

Between Fourteenth and Twenty-third streets, formerly a retail dry goods district, changes are marked, but the fall is not so complete, for wholesale houses came up from the old district down town to fill these quarters. Yet here also the changes are complete enough to discourage any returning ghost.

Same Old Union Square.

Union Square! It is the same old hodge-podge as of yore. Mrs. Lynch has departed and so has Tiffany, but not to the same locality. But here is the dealer in ancient paintings with the very same view of Venice that he showed in his narrow window in 1885. We do indeed miss the violin man who held forth up stairs near Venice, but on the corner Spangler's cafe and hotel still traffics. Fourteenth street itself should long since have been sent to Belgium for the war sufferers along with our other rags, and in the bag should go certain antiquated hostelry.

On the east side of the square one still sees the Union Square Hotel. Where once was a favorite residential quarter of the old street, later New York's Rialto, for all her theatres lay below Fourteenth street, the city has seen a regeneration that speaks well for any plans the association may have of restoring other prominent sections of Broadway. Some years ago, but not so many, middle Broadway, once the home of the textiles and millinery trades, showed signs of the dreaded decay. Tenants moved away in droves and entire blocks once busy as Babelutha lay in repose. The wholesale desertion was accounted for by the penuriousness of owners who refused to replace old floors, open space to air and sunlight, install new conveniences, electricity, elevators, etc.

Vincent Astor Leads Way.

Vincent Astor was the first landlord to react to the signs of the times. He gave some of his properties new fronts, gutted the interiors, fitted them up with modern appliances and soon had the satisfaction of filling the vacated buildings with responsible tenants. His example was followed by other landlords until now the trades are back again in the very section whence they had fled and pleased. It is said, to return because here they found the best conditions of traffic and the most convenient shipping facilities.

Critics of Broadway allow too little for the charm of irregularity and historical associations, for odd bits and queer views coming unexpectedly round the corner to meet one, for everything in fact that has the charm of natural growth. There are many buildings in that section of Broadway between Bond street and Canal which boast no elevator service and however difficult they are to live with attract the liking of persons who prefer irregular sky lines. Mechanical regularity in a city kills the picturesque. Broadway, no doubt, will under the vigorous propulsion of Major Henry G. Opdycke and his associates make herself cleaner and straighter and she may make herself beautiful with paint and varnish, but she can afford not to be beautiful much better than she can afford to be. She will do the latter at the expense of local color.

But local color, some one objects, does not pertain to a great cosmopolitan artery. Why not? The quest of local color and cosmopolitanism is not at all contradictory. The truest cosmopolitanism goes with the intensest local color, for otherwise you contribute nothing to the human treasury and make mankind one vast monotony. Harmonious diversity is the true cosmopolitan concept, and who will not applaud the desire of Broadway to range herself among the best dressed streets of the world?

Broadway Is New York.

Whatever claims other streets put in to be called the main artery of New York, these are poor compared to the rights of Broadway. Take the great street away and the others are no more than a congeries of little streets which might exist anywhere. Broadway is New York. She has become so by the same centripetal force which

draws village to town and town to capital. It has acted in her case to concentrate a city's nature in a center and to brand as provincial everything that is beyond that center.

A street which can renew itself out of its own pocket is one which has in itself the germs of perfect self-regeneration. When this street found herself being neglected by those who should have been her most faithful friends she bothered not with the task of rehabilitating certain sections, but set to work to repeat her ancient splendor further up the line. Different as is upper Broadway, that starts from Seventy-second street, from the lower, still upper Broadway reminds the old timer forcibly of 1890 and 1900. It shows the same succession of little brilliant shops, the same gaudy coloring and the same humanity that used to be seen in midtown. Almost one might believe as he threads the mass of handsome, high voiced women who promenade on Broadway between Seventy-second and 110th streets that he was back in the transition period when New York was getting out of village small clothes. The sensation received by walking there of an after-

noon is almost uncanny to an old timer. Broadway did not wait for an outside association to keep her alive, but, like an epitome of the city, sent her roots ahead and grew new limbs to extend or renew her youth when she found the old ones inadequate.

Felix Oldboy will remember when upper Broadway was merely a mass of verdure; he will remember when the Dakotas stood great and austere like an outpost of advancing civilization, with the Hotel MacLellan unthought of, a monument in the midst of shanty squallor like a pyramid on the edge of a desert. Felix will recall, too, the walls and gates of Bloomingdale, where he stood without and gazed with a delightful unreasoning shudder at the exquisite greenery of the asylum grounds, and after he had grown a little older he knew and can relive the sensation of his first drink taken like a man over the bar of Kerrigan's. These will be some of his recollections of upper Broadway, to which he seldom gives utterance and then only in congenial society lest the new generation of Greenwich Village bury him despite his protest that he is still alive.

And when he walks this road again amidst its busy modern life he cannot fail to realize that the spirit of Broadway which rules herein is not the Destroyer but the Redeemer. For the old street quivers up there, with life sustained unabated and unweakened through thirty years, the same spirit that he remembers dominated it below Forty-second street when he looked what he is still (but does not appear to be) a youth.

Highway's Soul Unchanged. The soul of Broadway has not changed in these thirty years. A smooth pavement, pipe galleries, additional lights, a different transportation system, whatever adventitious aids are being brought by her friends to renew her youth and prowess this street will accept as she has always accepted good or evil in a spirit of perfect complacency. For Broadway is not old and never was very young. Throughout her life she has been sufficient unto herself; stunted and neglected here, she will develop there; and undification, which is an avowed aim of the

association formed by her friends to aid her, has in reality always been her attribute.

Broadway never was a lady. This statement, while perfectly true, requires some explanation. A lady is hedged in by conventions; she is not a natural growth; she is trained to sit and stand just so; her voice is always keyed low; she wears her gloves in any weather without discomfort; when she paints her face she does it with reference to the pearly palette of "Coco."

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Broadway is big and vigorous; she laughs out loud when she is amused, may at one of the innumerable musical comedies she attends; she cannot wear

gloves for long at a time because they make her hands perspire; she reads all the newspapers and no other literature; her thirst for art is quenched in the shop windows; her colors of red and white are dashed on with the verve of Monticelli. The salute of a stranger man does not disconcert, she likes men and is not averse to a trifling flirtation. But she is big and vigorous and her pretensions harm no one. If she is immortal she renews herself. Except for some to be expected changes of toilet Broadway, feminine Broadway, as she trips untriflingly from the Amazon to the Marcellus, is the same woman who used to trip untriflingly from the St. James to Herald Square

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